

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (Geneva, Switzerland)

20 August 2025

Burundi: As risk factors multiply, it is imperative to extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate

Excellencies,

As serious human rights violations and abuses continue to be committed in Burundi in a context of widespread impunity, and as the country has entered a long electoral cycle that started with the 2025 legislative and communal elections and will culminate with the 2027 presidential election, and is associated with multiple risk factors of grave human rights violations and atrocities, the UN Human Rights Council should maintain its scrutiny of the country.

At its 60th session (8 September-8 October 2025), it should extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi.

2025 marks ten years since the outbreak of the still unresolved 2015 crisis.¹ The Council's 60th session will mark ten years since its first meaningful response to the crisis, resolution 30/27, and will be the last session before the tenth anniversary of the Special Session it held to address the crisis in Burundi (17 December 2015).²

Ten years on, Burundi's human rights situation remains of serious concern. No structural reforms have addressed long-standing human rights, governance, justice, and rule of law concerns. Violations continue with impunity, and all the issues highlighted in previous civil society letters remain. They include extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, sexual and gender-based violence, severe restrictions to the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association, and serious violations of economic, social and cultural rights.³

In this context, justice and other accountability mechanisms are not just silenced; they are systematically weaponised against critics, independent voices and opposition actors. This deliberate abuse of institutional power entrenches repression and undermines the credibility of any national accountability efforts.

Hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric, including at the highest level, remain high as the authorities restrict civic space and target independent civil society and media voices. At the time of writing, journalist Sandra Muhoza remains arbitrarily detained after conflicting judicial decisions.⁴

Some of the violations, including extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances, are even on the rise, according to local and international civil society reports.⁵ Multiple irregularities marred the 5 June

¹ See DefendDefenders et al., "At a critical juncture for Burundi, the Special Rapporteur's mandate remains vital," 29 August 2024, <https://defenddefenders.org/critical-juncture-burundi-sr-mandate-vital/> (accessed on 4 July 2025).

² See "24th special session of the Human Rights Council on preventing further deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi - 17 December 2015," at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/special-sessions/session24/th-special-session>

³ See DefendDefenders et al., "At a critical juncture for Burundi, the Special Rapporteur's mandate remains vital," op. cit.

⁴ Iwacu, "Affaire Sandra Muhoza : la justice se contredit," 2 July 2025, <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/affaire-sandra-muhoza-la-justice-se-contredit/> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

⁵ See World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) et al., "Burundi: Torture, Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings persist despite the State's commitments," 19 May 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/reports/burundi-torture-enforced-disappearances-and-extrajudicial-executions-persist-despite-the-states-commitments>; FOCODE, "Burundi : Répression électorale, disparitions forcées et verrouillage du pouvoir – La société civile brise le silence à l'ONU," 2 July 2025, <https://focode.org/focodemag020725> (accessed on 4 July 2025). For cases of disappeared persons, see FOCODE, "Des vies perdues, des vérités recherchées: Découvrez les cas déchirants de disparitions forcées," <https://ndondeza.org> (accessed on 8 July 2025).

2025 legislative and communal elections, in which the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party won 96.5% of votes and all contested National Assembly seats, as well as almost every seat in commune-level elections. CNDD-FDD officials and the party's youth league, the *Imbonerakure* militia, intimidated, harassed, and threatened the population, and key opposition figures were barred from running – leading to “elections without opposition.”⁶ Prominent Burundian human rights organisations denounced these irregularities and called for new elections.⁷ In parallel, the militarisation of the *Imbonerakure* militia has been reported, including in the context of armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).⁸ In a volatile regional context, more than half the total number of Burundians who had gone into exile since April 2015 (over 257,000 persons) remain abroad as refugees.

In his oral report to the Council's 59th session, in June 2025, the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Fortuné Gaetan Zongo asked: “Ten years later, where are we? Is the crisis resolved?” He said that “the situation is worrying.” In this regard, he stressed that “impunity remains the norm [and is] a major obstacle to reconciliation, [and that] justice is being used against opponents, journalists and human rights defenders.” He also addressed the problem of “abusive land dispossession affecting widows, orphans, or vulnerable families, [which] demonstrates a dynamic of land predation for the benefit of influential members of the ruling party, high-ranking army officers, or influential businessmen without consent or adequate compensation,” which “further undermines women's economic and social rights.”

Since the adoption of resolution 57/22, in October 2024,⁹ not only has the human rights situation deteriorated, with a downward trend for both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights,¹⁰ but Burundi's national human rights institution, the Independent National Human Rights Commission (CNIDH), saw its President flee the country with his family. This follows the defection of two members of the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation (CVR) and shows that even former appointees fear for their physical integrity and do not trust national institutions, such as the judiciary, to protect them.¹¹ Despite the decision to uphold the CNIDH's “A” status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI),¹² the CNIDH lacks independence and continues to deliver statements praising the gov-

On 29 April 2025, several special procedure mandate-holders addressed a Communication (no. BDI 1/2025) to the Burundian Government, raising a range of issues, including arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances (available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29857>).

⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Burundi: Elections Without Opposition,” 12 June 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/12/burundi-elections-without-opposition> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

⁷ “Élections législatives et communales du 5 juin 2025 au Burundi: Urnes sous contrôle, voix muselées; alerte de la société civile burundaise,” 16 June 2025, <https://www.acatburundi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Declaration-publique-des-organisations-de-la-societe-civile-burundaise-pour-les-elections-legislatives-et-communales-du-5-juin-2025.pdf> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

The signatories highlighted that: “Such an absolute victory for the ruling party is completely incompatible with the principles of a free, pluralistic, and competitive electoral system. Civil society strongly condemns the electoral irregularities and political violence that marred the legislative and municipal elections of 5 June 2025. These are contrary to the Constitution of Burundi (2018), the Electoral Code (2024), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (2007).”

⁸ SOS Médias Burundi, “Cibitoke: mobilisation massive des Imbonerakure aux frontières,” 24 February 2025, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2025/02/24/cibitoke-mobilisation-massive-des-imbonerakure-aux-frontieres/> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

⁹ Available at: <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/RES/57/22>

¹⁰ These are the result of, or are compounded by, inflation, water, fuel and electricity shortages, lack of access to health services, natural disasters, and socio-economic and humanitarian challenges. See for instance Burundi Times, “IMF urges urgent reforms as inflation hits 39% in Burundi,” 15 April 2025, <https://www.burunditimes.com/imf-urges-urgent-reforms-as-inflation-hits-39-in-burundi/>; SOS Médias Burundi, “Burundi: persistent fuel shortage exposes population to serious dangers,” 28 April 2025, <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/en/2025/04/28/burundi-persistent-fuel-shortage-exposes-population-to-serious-dangers/> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

¹¹ Iwacu, “Des exils révélateurs,” 25 April 2025, <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/des-exils-revelateurs/> (accessed on 7 July 2025).

¹² In April 2024, GANHRI recommended the CNIDH's downgrading from “A” to “B” status, in consideration of its lack of independence. In early 2025, the decision was suspended. New developments, including the CNIDH's former President exile and the appointment of CNDD-FDD-affiliated commissioners, including its new President, may lead GANHRI to reconsider

ernment, including at the Human Rights Council, while refusing to take up politically sensitive cases. This means that there is no nationally-mandated mechanism that is able or willing to protect human rights, including by investigating and reporting on human rights violations, supporting victims and survivors, protecting those at risk, and holding government and other public officials to account.

~ ~ ~

In light of previous cycles of abuse prior to, during, and after elections, the international community should remain mobilised to ensure scrutiny of the situation in Burundi, preserving the Special Rapporteur's documentation role and his ability to report to the Council, at least twice a year.

Several of the Risk Factors outlined in the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes remain present in Burundi.¹³ Some, including Risk Factor 8 ("triggering factors or events that may seriously exacerbate existing conditions, such as elections and pivotal activities related to elections"), point to more, not fewer, concerns than one year ago, before the electoral cycle opened and the ruling party closed avenues for peaceful transition through competitive, free and fair elections.

This year will see additional elections, namely Senate and Hill ("*collinaires*") elections, and the next presidential election is planned for May 2027. In a context of increased repression of independent and opposition voices, the Burundian Government continues to disregard or minimise the severity of human rights challenges in the country. It refuses to grant access to and meaningfully cooperate with independent human rights bodies and mechanisms, and has effectively ceased its cooperation with the Council's mechanisms, in violation of its Membership obligations. All requests by the Special Rapporteur to visit the country have either been rejected or remained unanswered.

~ ~ ~

The Council should make clear that being a Member comes with an obligation to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as an enhanced responsibility to accept scrutiny. In the absence of progress, and in light of ongoing violations and impunity, we consider that there is no basis to depart from the Council's current approach. Until measurable and sustainable progress on key human rights issues of concern, including addressing impunity for past and ongoing violations, has been made, the Council should ensure continued scrutiny of Burundi's human rights situation.

Consequently, at its 60th session, the Council should adopt a resolution that reflects the concerns over the country's human rights situation, including risk factors of serious violations and atrocities, and aims to:

- **Extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi;**
- **Request the Special Rapporteur to present to the Human Rights Council, at its 62nd session, an oral update on the situation of human rights in Burundi, and also to submit to the Council, at its 63rd session, and to the General Assembly, at its 81st session, a comprehensive report;**

its decision. In his June 2025 oral update, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about "the CNIDH's dysfunction, which is aggravated by the flight of its former president, Mr. Sixte Vigny Nimuraba, and the irregular appointment of its new members." He added that "[t]his situation [...] is contrary to the Paris Principles and calls for a review of its A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions."

¹³ See DefendDefenders et al., "At a critical juncture for Burundi, the Special Rapporteur's mandate remains vital," op. cit., as well as the letter's Annex listing risk factors as per the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes.

In 2019, the Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry (Col) on Burundi, which had previously documented that extrajudicial executions, disappearances, sexual violence, arbitrary detention and torture committed since 2015 may amount to crimes against humanity, conducted a risk assessment based on the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. It raised the alarm over structural risk factors of atrocity crimes, including the governance system under the CNDD-FDD, the appointment of individuals under international sanctions for serious rights violations to senior government positions, the continued operations of the *Imbonerakure*, and the refusal to release detained human rights defenders. The Col reiterated its warning in 2021, noting that the National Intelligence Service (SNR), police and *Imbonerakure* continued to arbitrarily arrest, disappear, torture and kill perceived political opponents, as well as individuals accused of collaborating with armed opposition groups.

- **Reaffirm that all States Members of the Human Rights Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms, and urge Burundi to be mindful of these standards;**
- **Urge the Government of Burundi to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting him access to the country and by providing him with all the information necessary to properly fulfil his mandate;**
- **Urge the Government of Burundi to constructively cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in particular its regional office for Central Africa, and to present a timeline for the reopening of its country office in Burundi; and**
- **Request the United Nations Secretary-General to provide the Special Rapporteur with the assistance and all resources necessary to fulfil his mandate.**

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely,

1. Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture – Burundi (ACAT-Burundi)
2. AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network)
3. Amahoro Development International Center (ADIC)
4. Association Burundaise pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues (A.PRO.D.H)
5. Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA)
6. Burkinabè Human Rights Defenders Coalition (CBDDH)
7. Burundian Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CB-CPI)
8. Burundian Human Rights Defenders Coalition (CBDDH)
9. Burundian Human Rights League Iteka
10. Burundian Union of Journalists (UBJ)
11. Centre pour le Renforcement de l'Éducation et du Développement de la Jeunesse (CREDEJ)
12. CIVICUS
13. Civil Society Coalition for Monitoring the Elections (COSOME)
14. Coalition of Human Rights Defenders-Benin (CDDH-Bénin)
15. Coalition of Human Rights Defenders / Living in Refugee Camps (CDH/VICAR)
16. Collectif des Avocats pour la Défense des Victimes de Crimes de Droit International au Burundi (CAVIB)
17. Congolese Alert for the Environment and Human Rights (ACEDH RDC) – Democratic Republic of the Congo
18. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
19. Environment and Humanitarian Actions for Wellbeing (EAH Bien-Être)
20. EurAc (Europe-Central Africa Network)
21. Fondation Rester Debout pour la Paix (FOREDEPA)
22. Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement (FOCODE)
23. Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile (FORSC)
24. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
25. Human Rights Watch
26. INAMAHORO Movement
27. Media Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IM2DH) – Togo
28. Integrated Refugee Organization (IRO)
29. International Federation of ACAT (FIACAT)
30. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
31. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
32. King Umurundi Freedom (KUF-ASBL)
33. Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

34. Light For All
35. Mouvement International de la Jeunesse Burundaise (MIJB)
36. Movement of Women and Girls for Peace and Security in Burundi (MFFPS)
37. Network of Human Rights Defenders in Central Africa (REDHAC)
38. Network of NGOs for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (RONGDH) – Central African Republic
39. Refugee Rights Action Organization (RRAO)
40. Researchers Without Borders (REWIB) – Uganda
41. Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP)
42. SOS-Torture / Burundi (SOSTB)
43. Together for the Support of Human Rights Defenders in Danger (ESDDH)
44. Togolese Human Rights Defenders Coalition (CTDDH)
45. Tournons La Page
46. Tournons La Page Burundi
47. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)